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"HAPPY IN MY JUDAISM":

*A PLEA FOR OUR JEWISH BRETHREN
ON ACTIVE SERVICE.*

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

BAYSWATER SYNAGOGUE,

ON

SABBATH BERESHITH,
OCTOBER 13th, 5678—1917.

BY

THE CHIEF RABBI

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A Sermon.

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J. H. Hertz

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SERMON

Preached at the BAYSWATER SYNAGOGUE,

On Sabbath Bereshith.—October 13th, 1917-5678.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים
בָּרָא אֹתוֹ:

“And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him.”—GENESIS i. 27.

Next to God's unity, the most essential and the most characteristic teaching of Judaism is that contained in this twenty-seventh verse of the first chapter of Genesis. It has often been pointed out by Jewish teachers that whereas heathenism degraded man by making him kneel before brutes or the works of his hand, Judaism declared man to be made in the image of God—the crown and culmination of God's creation.

This doctrine is not merely a matter of historical theology, but a vital and timely truth for the men and women of to-day.

Let me explain. For the last fifty years there has been a battle between Man and the Universe ; between man—his dignity, his freedom, his significance, on the one hand ; and, on the other, the infinite world—nature, history, society. From this battle man seems, in the eyes of many, to have emerged with his importance considerably weakened, with his soul shrivelled up to the vanishing point. Instead of lord of creation, he is to-day merely an infinitesimal article in the inventory of the Universe. “ Man is but a microscopic being relatively to astronomical space, and he lives on a puny planet circling around the sun, a star of inferior rank, one among four hundred million other such stars scattered through the infinite abyss of immeasurable space,” says astronomy. The newer studies and latter-day events merely reinforce upon the average man this teaching of astronomy. The widening of the historical horizon by the study of primitive man and by the unearthing of dead civilisations ; political phenomena,

like the rise of democracy with its levelling downwards ; this present world-tragedy, when tens of millions of men are arrayed in ghastly combat against tens of millions—all emphasize the meaning of *mass* in human affairs, with the consequent cheapening of the individual. Not so very long ago it was hard to conceive of a universal humanity because personalities of men seemed so distinct. People found it hard to see the forest on account of the trees. In our generation, however, it is almost impossible to see the trees for the forest. Man is so clear that men become obscure. The race is more and more, but the individual withers.

Now we are prepared to see the timeliness of the teaching of : “ And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him.” To-day, when the human soul freezes, shrinks, well-nigh vanishes in the horizon of infinite space ; when personality becomes vague, defective, dwindling ; when

man is in danger of losing himself—Judaism comes, and on the very first page of our Bible proclaims to us : “ There is something in thee which antedates birth and outlives death. Though unseen, immaterial, imponderable, there is something in thee greater than towering mountains, heaving seas, or the silent lights that stud the canopy of night. Unlike them, that something in thee has the capacity to feel and think and dream ; to love, to strive, to fall and to rise again ! A tiny atom, thou canst yet rethink the Creator’s thoughts, soar to the Divine, labour in the cause of the truth and righteousness, because thou art a spark of that central Sun which is the Creator, Sustainer and Life of all eternities.”

Such is the perennial message of this first page of our Scriptures. When the Tishri-festivals are over, and the vast teachings of New Year, Atonement Day, Tabernacles and Rejoicing of the Law are apt to recede from

our memory, Judaism opens our workaday year by giving back unto us our human personality. Our duty as Jews is to proceed to regain our Jewish personality, our Jewish consciousness.

“Jewish consciousness”—much more is meant by this than by the phrase that one hears from the lips of even lax Jews, viz., that they are proud of being Jews. That phrase always recalls to my mind the words spoken recently by a renowned French co-religionist : “I will not say I am proud of being a Jew. I do not see how I am to be proud of something that is not my achievement, but has come to me as a matter of birth ; I would rather say, *I am happy in my Judaism.*” That is the great problem for Jewish ministers, teachers and parents of to-day—How to make our children happy in their Judaism. For, unless they are happy in their Judaism the full measure of Jewish personality will never be theirs. Now they cannot be happy in their Judaism if they do not love it ; and they

cannot love it if they do not know it, if they are unfamiliar with Jewish ideals and Jewish teachings, with the martyrdoms and the triumphs of the Jew throughout the ages!

There is one class especially that, above all others, I am most anxious to see, not merely proud of, but happy in, their Judaism. Thousands of our sons are now hourly face to face with death, prepared at any moment to bring the supreme sacrifice. In view of *their* ordeal, our fears and panics in recent air-raids appear petty, cowardly, impious. Standing in the valley of the shadow of death, they need something to fortify their souls; something to kindle within them into a bright flame the hope that transcends the grave, to bring home to them man's kinship with the Divine, to deepen within them the conviction that fellowship with the Eternal must be an eternal fellowship. Only one agency can accomplish all this—religion. Now none of us is willing that such inspiration shall come

to our Jews at the Front from the Churches. But as one of the Church dignitaries rightly said : “ If the Christian efforts of proselytising among Jews are resented, why do not Jews do something for their own religious welfare, and circulate among themselves literature appertaining to the tenets of their faith, and thereby try to inculcate a more spiritual outlook in their midst ? ” My friends, the sting of this question lies in its unanswerable justice and bitter truth.

What is wanted is Jewish religious war literature for free distribution among our men at the Front. Nothing strengthens a man more than that which heightens his sense of personality. And only Jewish books can do that for the Jewish soldier ; they alone can waken his Jewish consciousness, and render him happy in the thought of being a member of a great, eternal, indomitable people that has fought and suffered on every battlefield of human thought ; a link

in a chain which all the tempests under heaven could not break. To meet this vital need, I produced, some months ago, a "Book of Jewish Thoughts," of which 40,000 copies have already been, or are about to be, distributed. The nature of this book can best be seen if I read to you the letter with which I prefaced it:—

TO MY JEWISH BRETHREN ON ACTIVE SERVICE.

I am sending you this little Book of Jewish Thoughts and hope it will reach every one of His Majesty's Jewish sailors and soldiers. It brings you the undying message of our Holy Faith; memories of Jewish loyalty and martyrdom in the service of God and Humanity throughout the ages; as well as reflections on the higher issues of this world-conflict when viewed under the aspect of Judaism. For every Sacred Occasion of the Jewish Year, moreover, you will find in it an echo of some characteristic note of the Festival that will remind you of the deathlessness of Israel and its Teaching.

May these "Thoughts" help you to realize that *every Israelite holds the honour of his people in his hands*. May they strengthen your trust in God, and deepen your invincible faith in the justice of the Allied Cause. "Be strong and of a good courage; be not affrighted, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

My prayers, and those of the whole House of Israel are with you. May your going out and your coming in be blessed.

The distribution of such a Jewish anthology is of surpassing importance, for the book reaches thousands of men who never see the Chaplains. Often a copy falls into the hands of non-Jews, and its contents come to them as a revelation. Henceforth they are filled with a new respect for Jews and Judaism. But a book of selections, no matter how classical these may be, is not sufficient. I have, therefore, in the press a brief survey of Jewish history. Unfortunately, funds so far in hand for this second publication cover the cost of only 5,000 copies, and 40,000 are needed. It is, furthermore, necessary to circulate the Jewish translation of the Psalms amongst our men, and also copies of the Jewish Version of the Bible. It is nothing short of an infamy that in the past only the Christian translation of the Psalms was available for our men. A fortnight or so

ago, I received by cable permission to make use of the new Jewish Version of the Bible recently issued in America. Judging by the splendid manner in which a few wise-hearted men and women have helped me with the first book, I venture to hope that the permission given me by the Jewish Publication Society of America will not remain an empty and valueless privilege.

A year ago, an appeal for Y.M.C.A. huts was made in the Synagogues of the Metropolis and Provinces. The Jewish response for that most worthy charity totalled a very substantial sum. If a similar amount were forthcoming in this Jewish and patriotic cause—for the propagation of Judaism among Jews, for the diffusion of Jewish knowledge among our men at the Front—it would mark an epoch in the spiritual history of the Anglo-Jewish community. For, remember, the entire generation of the men of to-day and to-morrow would

then come to know their Judaism, to love their Judaism, to rejoice and to be happy in their Judaism. What nobler monument to the loved and lost could you raise, what nobler thanksgiving offering on behalf of the loved who are still with us could you bring, than the providing of such religious literature for our Jewish soldiers and sailors !

אֲתֵם עֵדִי “Ye are my witnesses,” we read in our Haphtorah of to-day. On this golden text from the mightiest of prophets, an Anglo-Jewish author a generation ago wrote : “Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord. Each Jew and each Jewess is making his or her mark, or his or her stain, upon the wonderful, never-ending history of the Jews. Loyal and steadfast witnesses is it, or self-seeking and suborned ones ? A witness of some sort every Jew born is bound to be.” May God incline our hearts to help every endeavour to turn the sons of our people into loyal and steadfast witnesses of God and of Israel’s truth among the nations. Amen.

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